

CONNX[®] Case Study

Spiegel, Incorporated

Leading Retail Operation Saves \$10,000 Per Report Per Month Using CONNX[®]



- Spiegel, Inc. trims time needed to generate reports from over a month to a few days with CONNX.
- Company uses CONNX to dramatically reduce its application development cycle.
- Illinois based IS department gains easy access to RMS data on VAXcluster located at Ohio subsidiary.
- Customer satisfaction increases as CONNX improves warehouse efficiencies, resulting in fewer back orders.

When employees at Spiegel, Inc. in Downers Grove, Ill., needed reports about warehouse activity, they could wait more than a month.

Spiegel uses a merchandise data/inventory tracking system, residing on a VAXcluster at DFS, a Spiegel subsidiary in Columbus, Ohio. To get the information required for the reports, IS personnel in Illinois had to remotely access RMS data from the VAX, then use the data to create the reports.

Spiegel, Inc. is a leading international, multichannel specialty retailer, marketing fashionable apparel and home furnishings to customers through catalogs, more than 400 specialty retail stores, and innovative electronic platforms. Businesses include Spiegel Catalog, Eddie Bauer, Eddie Bauer HOME, AKA Eddie Bauer, Newport News, E STYLE, and For You from Spiegel. Spiegel's client/server installation includes the VAXcluster with DECnet and PATHWORKS, and PCs running Windows 3.11. Software developers use Visual Basic, Crystal

Reports — a report generator for the PC environment — and Access.

Project Manager, Tom Brouillette, had to find a way to reduce the amount of development time and resources required to generate reports. "Our programming consultants had to write an entire program to create a report," he says. "It could take four to six weeks. And because the structure of the reports was so complex, it took a lot of time — and money — even when we were just changing the reports. In addition, our programmers had to devote their time to creating reports, rather than working on new programs or maintaining our existing systems."

Consultants from the Chicago company, Altair, told Brouillette about CONNX, a client/server software product with an ODBC driver from CONNX Solutions in Bellevue, WA. "Our consultants had heard that CONNX was very flexible and that customers got a lot of use out of it," Brouillette recalls. "We brought in the product, used it to set up our applica-

tions, then put together a demo for our client area to show them how CONNX would solve some of their reporting problems."

The technical staff at DFS was also convinced that CONNX was a worthwhile investment when the Altair consultants were able to develop an application in merely three to four days, when it had taken three to four weeks before. The demo included a report, created in four days, that showed the purchase orders and receipt quantity based on SKU, and how many back orders existed against that item. "A report of this kind would have taken me six weeks to create before CONNX," Brouillette explains. "It enables us to rate the importance of the receipt of orders coming in. Before, trailers were unloaded based on 'first in, first out.' With our improved reporting capabilities, we would be able to gear our work load toward areas that would bring the best return. For example, in the fall, a peak season for us, we might be receiving goods for

Spiegel Case Study continued

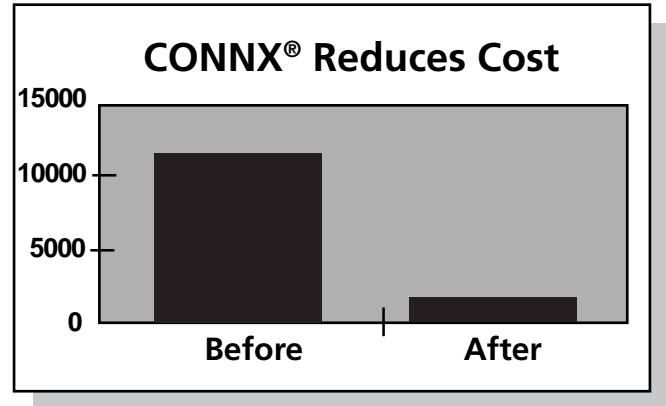
Christmas and Spring. Being able to receive the Christmas material first would result in fewer back orders — or back orders that could be turned around more quickly — providing greater customer satisfaction. Plus, it's made our entire warehouse management process more efficient."

Doug Folsom, Manager of IS Support at DFS, agrees that CONNX makes it much easier to create reports in a timely fashion. "With CONNX, I can go in and create a usable report in 15 to 20 minutes," he says. "For instance, if someone needs representative ages and days of certain purchase orders, I can quickly find the tables and create the reports." Users set up their report specifications and Folsom generates the reports. "Users get their reports through familiar point and click steps, while we can still protect the security of our data files," he explains.

The significant time savings

translate into impressive cost savings for Spiegel. "CONNX is saving us more than \$10,000 per report, per month," Brouillette says. "My original calculations were based on reducing man hours — billed at \$50 per hour — from 240 hours to 32...a savings of 208 man hours, or \$10,400. That level of reduction in man hours meant that creating just one report recovered the cost of purchasing the software."

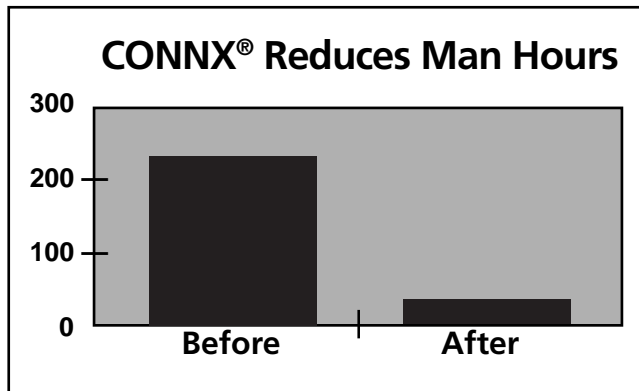
Brouillette also appreciates the power and flexibility of CONNX. "We use the data dictionary created for CONNX in Crystal Reports," he says. "We simply select the files and put them in Crystal Reports and it does the formatting. We think of CONNX as the pipeline from the VAX to our PC tools, such as Excel, Access, and Visual Basic. Its flexibility has proven itself to be a key benefit for us," he continues. "CONNX turns the VAX RMS file structure into a



database as far as the PC is concerned. So users can use standard SQL statements to access the files on the VAX. The result is a true client/server environment for the PC."

According to Brouillette, there are many future plans for the product. "We haven't even used CONNX to its full extent," he comments. "Although the biggest improvement for us will be the reduction in time it takes to develop reports, CONNX is also providing help in a number of other important areas. For example, it offers enhanced testing verification and testing for creating test data. With CONNX, we can use our PCs to update information on the VAX, manipulate data to fit our testing requirements and even manipulate data in a live production environment."

"It's hard to say exactly what CONNX's capabilities are," Brouillette concludes, "because you can do so many things with it."



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